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Bad Medicine: Medical Marijuana is the Wrong Prescription for Connecticut



By State Representative Toni Boucher

The United State Supreme Court recently ruled on several controversial issues in the last few weeks. On June 6th, the very day the Connecticut House of Representatives was scheduled to vote on the use of medical marijuana, the top Court upheld federal law that allows for the prosecution of individuals who grow or use marijuana for medical purposes.

I first began work on this issue after a very emotional and tearful appeal from a mother and father who had found their handsome talented, young son dead from a drug overdose at home in his bed. They and countless others warned that this measure would be devastating to our state.

Proponents of legalizing medical marijuana have gone a long way to try to convince the public that there are pain relief benefits to smoking marijuana. After exhaustive study and consultations with many state and national experts as well as cancer patients, I became increasingly convinced that the argument that smoked marijuana is medically necessary is untrue. The facts just are not there.

Let us put aside for the moment that marijuana is an illegal narcotic which is chronically abused in our country, and readily available to school aged children. And let us also suspend for the moment the very real probability that legalizing marijuana for any purpose undermines the work we have done in combating its recreational use. Let us only look at the medical data.

There is a great deal of research available on the effects of smoked marijuana. In Connecticut alone, Yale and Connecticut Medical Societies have determined that smoked marijuana causes damage to the brain, heart, immune system, and lungs, as well as impairing learning and memory, perception and judgment. It also contains cancer-causing compounds. Marijuana is also linked to a high percentage of automobile crashes and workplace accidents.

Other studies link marijuana use with the loss of motor skills, increased heart rate, and impairing the ability of the body's T-cells to fight off infections. Marijuana now

surpasses heroin and cocaine as a reason for emergency room visits. This sounds like bad medicine, indeed.

The most surprising aspect of what medical marijuana advocates endorse is the smoked use of the plant. There are no FDA approved medications that are smoked. This is because it is a terrible way to deliver medicine of any kind. It is impossible to administer any regulated dosage this way.

The medical organizations which combat the very illnesses medical marijuana advocates cite have rejected wholesale the purported benefits of marijuana smoking. The American Medical Society, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, American Glaucoma Society, American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Cancer Society, American Society of Addiction Medicine, American Academy of Family Physicians and American Academy of Pediatrics have all rejected crude smoked marijuana and leaf marijuana in treatment to various ailments.

It is common sense that modern medical science has other treatments and pain relievers that are more effective than smoked marijuana. And even if marijuana were the best medicine for any ailment, there are derivatives such as Marinol, and a soon to be approved inhaled aerosol version called Sativex. These deliver marijuana's effects without causing the same health problems that inhalation does. But medical marijuana proponents reject these alternatives, insisting that rolling and smoking marijuana cigarettes, and being allowed to grow any where from 4 to 12 marijuana plants are the answer.

The attempt to legalize smoking marijuana for medical purposes is a great way for advocates of legalizing marijuana for recreational purposes to get their foot in the door. Giving marijuana a good name and respectability that would come from the legalization of the drug for medical purposes, would help change public opinion about its social stigma. But it cannot erase conclusive medical evidence. A marijuana cigarette is four times as potent as one tobacco cigarette producing tumors, respiratory and heart ailments as well as compounding the medical dangers of a suppressed immune system.

As elected officials and advocates for the health and safety of our constituents, we are entrusted to help improve the lives of the people we represent, not placing them in harm's way. Passing bills that encourage a smoked filled lung from whatever the source- tobacco, pollution or a smoked drug such as marijuana is not safe and makes no sense.

I am tremendously grateful and proud that we have we have fought repeated attempts to take our state down this dangerous path and have not broken a trust with our constituents of, at least this case, doing no harm. Marijuana is a harmful drug that doesn't save or improve lives. It can undermine the seriously ill's best prospect of recovery and can ruin their life. It's the wrong prescription for Connecticut.

Toni Boucher is currently serving her 5th term representing Norwalk and Wilton as a member of the Connecticut State House of Representatives